Christine S. McCreary

Preface
by Donald A. Ritchie

In her 45 years of service on Capitol Hill, Christine S. McCreary saw great changes in both the Senate and in Washington, D.C. Born in New York City in 1926, Christine Stewart was a student at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida, when the United States entered World War II and the federal government put out a call for civilian employees to staff the many new wartime agencies. She passed the typing test and immediately left for Washington. Although still a segregated city, the capital offered exciting challenges and opportunities for a young African American woman.

Beginning at the Office of Price Administration, she moved to the Federal Security Administration. One day while working in the FSA typing pool, Stewart was called to take dictation for an official whose secretary was out sick. The official, Stuart Symington, was so impressed with her work that took her along when he became chairman of the National Security Board and director of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. She served as administrative assistant to Symington's assistant, George L. P. Weaver. In 1952 Symington won election to the United States Senate from Missouri as a Democrat, and offered her a position on his Senate staff. She accepted, but waited until after the birth of her son. She had married Rivers D. McCreary, then a railroad postal clerk in Washington and a musician. They had two sons, Rivers and James.

Very few African Americans held professional positions in the Senate in 1953. Jesse Nichols had become the government documents librarian for the Senate Finance Committee in 1937, and Marguerite Ingram became the first black secretary when she joined the staff of Senator Paul Douglas, an Illinois Democrat, in 1949. By 1953 the Senate restaurant in the Capitol and the staff cafeteria in the Senate Office Building remained unofficially segregated. Although most of the kitchen staff, waiters and cafeteria workers were black, the patrons were exclusively white. Christine McCreary was among the first to challenge this de facto segregation by dining regularly in the staff cafeteria.

McCreary remained on Senator Symington's staff until his retirement in 1977. She then joined the office of Senator John Glenn, Democrat of Ohio, who was serving in his first term. McCreary retired from the Senate in 1998 at the end of Senator Glenn's fourth term, when he chose not to run for reelection. During her nearly half century on Capitol Hill she saw size of each senator's personal staff multiply. When she began the entire Senate staff worked out of one Senate Office Building. By the time she retired, three office buildings accommodating a staff that had increased seven fold. During those years she moved from the Old Senate Office Building (later named the Richard Russell Building) with its mahogany

doors, crystal chandeliers, and marble fire places, to the newest building (named for Senator Philip A. Hart), with its duplex office suites, computer terminals, and satellite dishes for instant communications. The staff of the Senate also became more racially integrated, as did the Senate floor with the elections of Senator Edward W. Brooke, a Republican of Massachusetts, and Carol Moseley Braun, a Democrat of Illinois. Christine McCreary died in Dover, Delaware, on May 30, 2006.

About the Interviewer: Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of C.C.N.Y., he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His article on "Oral History in the Federal Government," appeared in the Journal of American History. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard Press, 1991) and *History of a Free Nation* (Glencoe, 1998). He also edits the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)* (Government Printing Office). A former president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

Christine McCreary

Staff of Senator Stuart Symington, 1953-1977
and Senator John Glenn, 1977-1998

Interview
(Tuesday, May 19, 1998)
Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

RITCHIE: I understand you are from New York originally.

McCREARY: Yes.

RITCHIE: Where from in New York?

McCREARY: I lived on 21st Street in Lower Manhattan and went to P.S. 11.

RITCHIE: Oh, in Manhattan. I grew up in Queens.

McCREARY: Oh, yes, I know about Queens and the other boroughs.

RITCHIE: So you went to the local schools?

McCREARY: I went to P.S. 11 and then I went to Harren High School. And then when I graduated from there my father decided to send me to Florida to

Bethune-Cookman, because he was from Florida and admired Mrs. Bethune. He thought she was great and she was very strict. So he said, "go to Bethune-Cookman." Well, I didn't know very much about Bethune-Cookman, and I had never been in an all black school. Because where I lived, we were the only black family on 21st Street.

RITCHIE: My father's family used to live on 23rd Street–my great-grandfather ran a shoe store there.

McCREARY: Oh, yes? My father wouldn't allow us to play with anybody except our schoolmates or those who lived on the same street. He was very strict. There weren't any blacks in the area where I lived.

RITCHIE: And what did your father do?

McCREARY: He was a cook and he had a little restaurant on 69th Street, his own little restaurant. That was his side thing. He also kept that building on 21st Street in order. He was the superintendent.

RITCHIE: The building where you lived?

McCREARY: Yes.

RITCHIE: Did many of the kids live in the building where you did?

McCREARY: Some of them did, some of them lived at other places. All of the apartments upstairs were all white people. We lived down in the basement, because my father took care of the building, collected rent and saw to the cleanliness of the building and kept the heating system working.

RITCHIE: What kind of a restaurant did he run?

McCREARY: It was a small place and people would come in and drink coffee. Daddy was a chef. He always used to say that he sailed the seven seas, so I just assumed he cooked on a ship.

RITCHIE: What did your mother do?

McCREARY: She was a housewife and sometimes helped my father.

RITCHIE: At the restaurant?

McCREARY: At the restaurant and at the apartment. Because he took care of three buildings, and they all had elevators–they were five to six stories high–and he had to see that they were in order every day. My mother would dust, sweep and mop the stairwells and hallways.

RITCHIE: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

McCREARY: I had three brothers and I had one sister, but my sister didn't live with us. It was just my brothers and I. He was very strict. He didn't want any foolishness. We had to be home by 4 p.m. I guess even now I am very concerned about things and very strict about things with my two sons. I had two sons. My oldest son, Rivers, he was in the service and now he's a policeman over in Dover, Delaware, doing fine. My other son, James, was in the Navy, but he got hurt on the ship and he is now deceased.. He had one son and that child is doing fine.

He's over at Archbishop Carroll, he's a freshman this year, doing very well. I hope he continues.

RITCHIE: What high school was it that you said you went to?

McCREARY: Harren, on 59th Street and 9th Avenue.

RITCHIE: Did you take the subway up there?

McCREARY: No, Harren was at 59th and I lived on 21st, so I could start out early enough to walk there.

RITCHIE: And then you went to Bethune-Cookman?

McCREARY: Yes, I went to Bethune-Cookman, but before I could get involved in everything I wanted to get involved in there, World War II came about. The President came on the radio and said he needed employees. They were offering jobs for $1,440.00 or $1,620.00 depending on what you could do, shorthand or typing. Well, in New York, we learned how to type and do shorthand. My favorite was the Gregg System of shorthand. So I was prepared for that, but little did I know I was so prepared for it. I had to take the exam. Mrs. Bethune said she had gotten a letter for any of the students at the school who wanted to take that exam for the job. So I raised my hand. It was just myself and another girl.

We went to the post office. The lady said, "Now, all the white people sit in the front and the blacks in the back." There was just two of us, but we had to sit in the back. Well, you see, if you're sitting in the back you don't hear as well. Well, that kind of shocked me. I thought, I don't want to sit back here! Because I wasn't

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used to that. But you have to go with the program.

RITCHIE: And this was in Florida?

McCREARY: Yes, this was in Florida, in Daytona Beach. Then they had these typewriters sitting there. When she put us all there, and the two of us way in the back where we could barely hear. I thought it was strange, but I wasn't going to get involved in that. So I sat back there and she said, "When I give the signal, then you start typing." We typed some pamphlets that they gave us. Since I had learned to type without letters on the keys I never looked at the keys, I just typed. I got such a very high score that within two days I got a telegram to report to Washington! I was so excited. But it had paid off, because I had taken all that secretarial training before I graduated from high school and I was prepared.

RITCHIE: That's great. Can I ask you a little about Mary McLeod Bethune? Did you get to meet her?

McCREARY: Oh my, yes. She was a good friend of my father's and she was a very interesting woman. Big! She was tall. And she was very exacting and very strict. Well, I was used to strictness because my father was strict. But she was just–strict! And she didn't play. So when I told her that I had gotten a letter to

report to Washington, and that my father and mother would have to approve it and I wanted her support. She said, "I am very proud of you to get that position, go right ahead."

RITCHIE: You were still a teenager then?

McCREARY: Oh, yes. See, I looked much younger than I was. I guess I looked like I was about fifteen or thirteen or something.

RITCHIE: What was Mrs. Bethune's school like?

McCREARY: Oh, her college was nice. It was small, but they had a lot to do and she had to do things as she got the money. It's beautiful now. It's huge. It was really nice. It was just altogether different than what I was used to, though. I wasn't used to being in an all black school. When I started to say something or talk, everybody would stop just to listen to me talk. Because they had a Southern drawl, I didn't understand half of what they were saying! It was just one of those things. They didn't understand me, I didn't understand them. So I was sort of glad to get away! [chuckles]

RITCHIE: Florida must have been different too.

McCREARY: Florida was beautiful. Very unlike New York. I had never seen banana trees or orange groves. It was awesome.

It was different. It was segregated. The school was all black. You had to get used to it. It was altogether different, just a whole new world. I was so glad to get away! I'm not saying that against Mrs. Bethune though, nothing like that. She was very strict, she was what she was. She wanted the work done! You did your work, you ate, you were in bed early. She didn't like a lot of foolishness, no playing around. She was very strict, and that's what my father liked. It was okay, but I was glad to get away! [laughs] So then I came to Washington.

RITCHIE: That was in 1943?

McCREARY: Yes, ‘43 or ‘44. It's been so long since then! I'm 72 now and trying to think way back then!

I had to come to Washington and they had Midway and other halls where you could stay. My father said no, my mother said it would be all right. But they weren't together, so I had to wait to get approval from him and approval from my mother. Finally they both agreed when they found out my brother was stationed at Fort Belvoir. My father felt that he could keep an eye on me.

RITCHIE: So it was like a residence hall?

McCREARY: Yes, just like a college campus.

RITCHIE: Where was that?

McCREARY: In Northeast Washington, over there where they have all those markets now. That's where those buildings were, there were three of them.

RITCHIE: Oh, yes, by Florida Avenue, where the Northeast Farmers Markets are.

McCREARY: By the markets, and they had trolley cars to get downtown.

RITCHIE: Well, what was Washington like during World War II?

McCREARY: Washington was segregated. I had to just try to deal with that. We lived out there in the halls, Midway, Wake, and the other–there were three of them. It was just so different for me. I didn't see anybody I knew until one day I was walking along and I saw a girl coming up 7th Street. I was on my way home and I said, "I know her." I yelled, "Florence Gugliomo?" She stopped and we

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were so excited. I was so glad to see her and she was so glad to see me, because she didn't know anybody either. She was here working. Now she came from New York and I had come up from Florida. So we became friends again just like in school. It was really good to see her.

RITCHIE: When you came to Washington, where did you work initially?

McCREARY: I worked at the War Production Board, where I met Stuart Symington, who was the first Secretary of the Air Force.

RITCHIE: I guess he was then with the Surplus Properties Administration.

McCREARY: It was a big government agency, and they had a big secretarial pool. The work would come down from upstairs and you'd do it. So Symington needed someone to come up and take shorthand. Nobody in the pool could take shorthand except me. The Head Secretary indicated that Mr. Symington's secretary was ill and that he needed someone who could take shorthand. So I went up to his office. He looked at me and said: "How old are you?" [laughs] I must have been 17 or 18 at that particular time. It was a long time ago. He said, "Well, can you take dictation?" I said, "Yes, sir." And then he started

dictating his letters. I ended up with about thirty letters. He said, "Now you take those and when you finish with them, bring them back and I'll check them and we'll see how it works out."
I went downstairs and I typed them out Right place at the right time. I took the letters back and he looked at each letter and he said, "Well, I'll be darned. That's fine. You did an *excellent* job. How would you like to just stay here with me until my secretary comes back?" I said, "I would like it." But you know I felt kind of silly because I didn't have the clothes for sitting in an office like that. To me I didn't look right. I thought my clothes made me look even younger. So I asked my mother to send me a dress or something that looked grown up. Of course, when I got it I still looked young. But I did well. So I worked with him for quite a while. And then he decided he was going to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and he took me with him. I had my own office and a messenger. It was really very nice.

RITCHIE: Now, when you first started working with him was he at the Pentagon? Where was the pool located?

McCREARY: It was over in Southwest, but I don't remember the name of the building. I think the Municipal Center, that was a part of it. And then he went to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation and that was a great big building and I

had my own office and messenger. It was just fabulous. You had to dress for it, so I kind of got my clothes together. But everything was just moving so fast in those days, seemingly.
After about two years with him he found it less necessary to check my work. He said whatever I did was fine with him, because I was thorough. I tried to be. So I did well with him.

RITCHIE: What kind of a person was Stuart Symington?

McCREARY: Oh, he was one of the nicest persons you'd ever meet. He didn't think about you being black or anything like that, he just treated you as a human

being. He was just that type of person. Tall and good looking and very nice, and so was his wife. She was a Wadsworth, and she was lovely. In fact, I had dinner over there three times. They lived in Georgetown. And you'd walk in and he would have a big table where some would sit with him and another table where some would sit with her. He always wanted me to sit with him. He'd say, "Now, you sit right there." [chuckles] It was just a whole new world. I just never dreamed I'd be in something like that. And you learned things from things like that. I enjoyed it. But I always made sure that I did my work and did it well, I thought.

RITCHIE: Did he tend to work long hours?

McCREARY: It all depended on what was going on. And if he had long hours I would work long hours. It wasn't that often.

RITCHIE: I've looked at a lot of transcripts of Senator Symington when he was on committees, and I've noticed that he liked to edit his remarks, a lot. He was very concerned about the way he sounded. Did you find it was the same thing when you were taking dictation? Would he say one thing and then edit it and change it quite a bit?

McCREARY: Well, he change things at time. But then again he didn't bother too much with what he said to me. But if he changed it all it didn't take that long to fix it. Then he'd just like to sit and talk and learn about you, and find our about your lifestyle and all that. That's just the way he was.

RITCHIE: So, in 1952 he ran for the U.S. Senate. When he won did he ask you to come to work for him?

McCREARY: Yes, I was so excited. But see, by that time my husband and I were expecting our second child. Mr. Symington said, "Well, I'll hold your job."

So after the baby was born I finally came to the Senate.
RITCHIE: I should ask before that, you met your husband at some point in the ‘40s?

McCREARY: I met him in Washington, he was going to Howard University when I met him. And he was so sharp, a nice looking guy. He started calling me and finally proposed. We've been married now fifty years.

RITCHIE: Wow, so that was in 1948?

McCREARY: Yes.

RITCHIE: Where did you live then when you were married?

McCREARY: I was living in Mayfair Mansions. Those were apartment buildings. Casell owned those apartments and he would rent them to people who were working for the government. It was nice, a two-bedroom apartment. Another girl was with me. In fact, she was my husband's cousin, so it worked out nicely.

RITCHIE: What does your husband do?

McCREARY: Well, he's a musician. He's the lead trumpeter of the Redskins' band too! He loves those Redskins, he's been with them for years. He worked and he'd do all kinds of things, but the best for him was music, that was his world. It still is. He loves music and he plays at every opportunity.

RITCHIE: Well, you came up here in 1953 with Senator Symington. I guess he had an office in the Russell Building in those days.

McCREARY: He had an office in the Russell Building. They only had the one building, so he only had three rooms, one for him and two for the staff.

RITCHIE: What was it like coming to work in the Senate in those days?

McCREARY: Well, it was different. I'll be frank, it was different. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know if I could eat there, because you see Washington was segregated and you had to deal with that. I mean, I wasn't pushing myself, but I asked the senator, "Where do I eat?" I think he was taken aback by my question. He called Senator Lehman. Senator Lehman called the cafeteria hostess to let her know that I worked with Senator Symington and that I would be eating my meals there.

Lehman didn't tell the lady that I was black. So Symington said, "It's taken care of, you just go over there and eat your breakfast." I thought everything was fine. When I went over there and I got to the door, the hostess came rushing over to the door where I was and asked if she could help me. I told her I'd come for breakfast. She said, "Oh, no, this is only for people who work in the Senate." I said, "Well, I work in the Senate with Senator Stuart Symington." [gasps] "Oh, oh, okay, come on in, have a seat." Well, everybody was stopped and looking and it was like a big to-do. I felt stupid. I wasn't used to this.

She said, "You just take a seat anyplace you can find. You just go through [the cafeteria line] and get your food." So I saw what they had. The cooks would put it on the plate and pass it to you. I was very uncomfortable, nervous. You could hear a pin drop. There appeared to be resentment. The cafeteria workers who I thought would be supportive were also very cold. As a matter of fact, my plate was shoved at me and I stepped back because I didn't want it on my clothes, and it all went on the floor. Well they were looking at me, but I had to deal with it. So anyway I got another plate. And then I went back the next day, and the next day, until finally they got used to seeing me coming in there and then there was no more problems with that.

RITCHIE: But there were problems for the next couple of days until then?

McCREARY: There were problems. I'd come out of the restaurant and all of the black people that worked in the Senate were people who worked on the custodial staff and were mail carriers. They were all lined up in the hall out there just to see me. Well, I felt like two cents, because I wasn't used to that. I didn't know what to say or do. And then of course there were some snide remarks, and all that kind of foolishness. I would just keep on going. I wouldn't even bother to stop and answer that. But you get through that too. It was just a lonesome time.

RITCHIE: Well, after the initial problems, did you go to the cafeteria regularly? And were there no more problems?

McCREARY: There were no problems. I'd just go in there and eat whenever I wanted to. But they knew me then, knew who I was. Then sometimes the girls in the office, they wanted to meet with me, so we just made a little pact, we'd just bring our lunch and we'd go to the park and sit and eat. And if we wanted to eat together we'd just bring our lunch and sit there and eat in the cafeteria. And then in the Russell Building there was a little opening where you could get your food and take it back to your desk.

RITCHIE: Like a carry-out, yes.

McCREARY: That's where I met all the secretaries and other office staff who worked in the Senate.

RITCHIE: They all went to the carry-out?

McCREARY: Yes, and especially on a Monday because they would tell you about all the fun they'd had on the weekend. I'd always be with them, and it was nice, because they weren't prejudiced. Those who worked in Symington's office weren't

prejudiced, either. There were one or two but they didn't bother me. But Symington was open. He'd tell anybody: "You can't get along with Chris, you can't get along with anybody."

Once he had an executive assistant who said something ugly to me. I got kind of hot and she kept up about it, and then she said, "Well, I'm going to discuss this with Senator Symington. I don't like your attitude." I said, "Fine, go right ahead." After a while the intercom buzzed on my desk. So I went in with my shorthand book. He said, "Chris, what's going on?" I explained what happened and he said, "Well, Chris, go out there and tell her to go to hell." I said, "Senator, I can't say things like that!" He said, "You have my permission. Now you can suit

yourself. You can go out there and tell her to go to hell or let it be." So I went out and said, "I have the senator's permission to tell you to go to hell." I went back to my desk, and she cried all day!

RITCHIE: It was a pretty small staff in those days. . .

McCREARY: We only had three rooms, but you know when we were in those three rooms, guess who I met? Bernard Baruch, he was a financier. I shook his hand, and he said "Stu, this is great!" He was holding my hand and he kept slapping the top of my hand. "Stu, this is wonderful!" I met so many people that he knew. I mean, you would never think that you would meet these people. One day I was sitting there in Symington's office when he was in the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. I had a messenger outside my office who announced: "Guess who's coming down the hall? Mrs. Bethune." I was so surprised. He said, "She's coming to see Mr. Symington." Sure enough I heard that cane in the hall. She liked us to call her "Mother Dear." She said, "Oh, everywhere I go I see my little black girls and boys." So I had to go through that. But she had a whole day with Symington before he became a senator. That was really nice, I got to be with her. She would say, "Now, this is one of *my* girls."

I went over to the House of Representatives to see [Adam] Clayton Powell, just to see him. I lived in New York but I never saw him before. He finally came to the door and stood at the door. Well, I knew he was nice looking but I didn't realize he was that good looking! He came out to the door and he just stood there and looked and I was speechless! He said, "Oh, so you're her." I thought, oh my God! You know, you just say, "Wow!" He was nice. I chatted with him for a few minutes and then I had to get back. I had to find my way back, because we had that one little subway car. But at least I had seen him–I wanted to tell my mother that because she would always get dressed and put on her gloves when there was an

election and say, "Oh, I am going to vote for Mr. Powell." So I thought she'd like that.

RITCHIE: So was she impressed that you had met him?

McCREARY: Oh Lord, she was impressed with anything I did! She said, "Oh, my God, you what?"

RITCHIE: Well, in those days the Senate was in session for about half the year and then out for half the year. Were there longer hours when it was in session or was it pretty much the same?

McCREARY: No, it was the same schedule. The senators would stay late but the employees didn't have to.

RITCHIE: So you could go home at a regular hour.

McCREARY: Yes.

RITCHIE: Did you work on Saturdays in those days?

McCREARY: Sometimes. It all depended. If you had something going, you had to work Saturdays. And when the Army-McCarthy hearings were going on, now that was a mess! I couldn't go out of the office because that black lady they said had done something.

RITCHIE: Annie Lee Moss.

McCREARY: Yes. He didn't want me out in the hall because he didn't want people to think I was she. Well, I didn't look nothing like that lady! She was older. But I couldn't go out of the office. He'd say, "Chris, I don't want you out in the hall. Now you never know, some of these crazy people might shoot you." [laughs] But I didn't go out in the halls, you never know.

RITCHIE: Senator Symington was really on the opposite side from McCarthy and was fighting McCarthy.

McCREARY: Oh, yes, that's why he didn't want me to go outside, because he didn't want anybody to mistake me for Annie Lee Moss. He didn't want anything to happen to me.

RITCHIE: You were talking about Joe McCarthy earlier, did you ever get to meet him?

McCREARY: Oh, God, I ran smack into his arms one day! [laughs] The bathrooms were right across the hall from our office, and then there was an elevator next to it. I was rushing out to get back to the office and he had gotten off the elevator and I just ran smack into him. He looked at me and I looked into the most piercing blue eyes you ever saw! Beautiful eyes. [laughs] He had the most piercing blue eyes you ever saw. He was a nice looking guy. I would think he was a pleasant fellow, but after all that other mess with Annie Lee Moss.

RITCHIE: He was pretty reckless in his accusations. I guess the staff was pretty close in those days, because as you said they all worked in the same building and ate in the same cafeteria.

McCREARY: Yes, we had a very close knit staff. On occasion I worked for other senators. For example, I took dictation from Bobby Kennedy.
They were doing something on a hearing and Bobby needed a letter right away. Senator Symington sent him over to the office. I was sitting there taking notes and I happened to look at his pants. And there was a patch on his pants! I couldn't get that out of my mind because I couldn't see how a man that rich could have a patch on his pants! But I didn't say anything, I just took my dictation. I typed the letter, gave it to him and he was satisfied. I never had any complaints.

RITCHIE: I guess that was back when he was on the staff of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. So in the office you were typing and taking dictation, did you do anything with the files?

McCREARY: Oh, yes, I handled all sorts of files, especially with the senator's files. I handled all the personal files. There was never a dull moment, although Symington did have a personal secretary. We worked together. She was really nice. Virginia Laird was her name, but she became ill. Then he got another secretary. He used to have so many dignitaries coming in.

RITCHIE: Many of them must have been military people since he was on

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the Armed Services Committee, and Appropriations, he had some very powerful positions.

McCREARY: He really did. He was–I don't know, I can't think of the words to describe Symington, because he was just super. Now putting Symington and

[John] Glenn together, Glenn is tops. He is a fine gentleman, and very nice. I have been very fortunate to work with these two outstanding and great men.

RITCHIE: I was wondering, Senator Symington was from Missouri. Did you ever have any dealings with his constituents showing up from Missouri? Were they surprised that he had a black woman secretary?

McCREARY: They were surprised, but they handled it. It was amazing the way they handled it, and I think it was amazing with me because I didn't know what to expect. But I was going to be prepared for whatever. But I would say hello and let them go ahead and say what they were going to say. I liked them and they would like me. I never said much, unless they started a conversation.

RITCHIE: When you were working for Senator Symington, he ran for president in 1960. Did that cause a lot of commotion in the office?

McCREARY: It didn't cause commotion. However, if he had won the presidency, he would have made an excellent one.

RITCHIE: Did you get a chance to meet John Kennedy when he was a senator?

McCREARY: No, only Bobby Kennedy, when I took dictation from him.

RITCHIE: Did you ever meet Lyndon Johnson?

McCREARY: Oh, yes, I met *all* of them. Years ago we only had the Russell Building and you met *everybody*. You could look down the hall any day and see Smathers, Symington, and Lyndon Johnson, all three tall ones, they'd be all together walking down the hall, just so nonchalant. I knew all those people.

RITCHIE: It must have been something when people you had seen walking around the building, like Kennedy and Johnson, became presidents in the 1960s.

McCREARY: Yes, it was great. I went to almost all of the inaugural balls. Kennedy's was my first inaugural ball and I felt like Cinderella. Everyone in the neighborhood wanted to see what I was wearing. Count Basie was playing and my

husband knew some of the men in the band, so they invited him on stage to play the trumpet with them.

RITCHIE: Did the atmosphere in the Senate change much in the 1960s? You came in the '50s, but in the '60s lots of things were happening: segregation ended in Washington.

McCREARY: Yes. That's when they started changing, and more blacks began to come and work for senators. I think there were about six blacks hired.
When the riots took place in 1968, after Dr. King was shot, I couldn't get home that night. Because if a black was seen in a car with whites they would try to turn the car over. I had to get Senator Symington's administrative assistant, Stanley Fike, I had to get in his car, in the back, down on the floor, and put a blanket over my head, for him to drive me home.

RITCHIE: And you were living in Northeast?

McCREARY: In Northeast, yes, where I live right now, on Kearney Street. So I got there and I was so glad to be home! That was a mess that day. It was terrible.

RITCHIE: H Street was right between here and there, that was one of the biggest riot corridors, so just to get across that must have been difficult.

McCREARY: Oh, yes. And Stanley Fike was driving. He said, "Now, keep your head down, Chris, keep your head down." He was the senator's administrative assistant. Oh, I was so glad to get home that night. The city was closed down and kids from the District were not supposed to go over into Maryland. So what did my younger son do? He goes over into Maryland to see some friends of his. They had to bring him home. One of the guards brought him home. We gave him a whipping too, because we told him not to. Oh, it was something. I had never seen anything like it. You didn't know who would hit you or kill you or something.

RITCHIE: Did you see much of the civil rights advocates in the 1960s, when they came to lobby Senator Symington?

McCREARY: I didn't see too many of them, but they did, I'm sure. Once in a blue moon I'd see somebody, but I didn't see too many of them. I met a lot of people, but I was really interested in meeting some of the blacks on the House side. I got a chance to meet John Conyers, you know him. He came to Washington looking for a job and he roomed with us for about a month until he could find a place to live. He was a nice guy. I haven't seen him in ages. I guess he thinks I'm dead!

But you just don't run over there, because they didn't have but that one little old jitney riding through the tunnel. They've made a lot of changes since I've been here.

RITCHIE: There were several black Congressmen in the '50s and '60s, but the first black senator was Senator Edward Brooke in 1967.

McCREARY: Yes, Senator Brooke. He was right across the hall, down on the other end.

RITCHIE: But the House as a bigger body had a lot more variety of members–and still does–that then Senate. And now there's Senator Carol Moseley-Braun from Illinois.

McCREARY: Yes, I've never met her. I know she's there but I've never met her.

RITCHIE: Well, the Senate's gotten so big now it's hard to . . .

McCREARY: Yes, meet anybody. That's right, you don't know who's who.

RITCHIE: So you stayed with Senator Symington through his entire career

in the Senate, from 1953 to 1977.

McCREARY: Senator Symington spoke with Senator Glenn on my behalf. And I've been with him ever since. This will be the end of his term, so all during his tenure I've been with him.

RITCHIE: I guess by the time that Senator Symington retired, his staff was a lot larger than when you had started with him.

McCREARY: Yes, it was. We started getting more space and could hire more people. But he liked his staff and he liked everything to be going along fine. If there was anything that you thought you couldn't handle, tell him. He had an open door policy for that. But not many of them, we only had one or two people who were problems, but he'd deal with that. He could deal with anything.

RITCHIE: I remember Stanley Fike, I had some dealings with him when Senator Symington was retiring. He was a newspaper man, I think, before he became Senator Symington's administrative assistant. He seemed like a very competent person.

McCREARY: He was very fine. He was not out-going, but he was quiet and

he would do what he had to do. He had functions at his home, and I've been over there. His daughters were nice, his family. He was real nice.

RITCHIE: He was in charge of keeping the office running, the general office manager.

McCREARY: Yes, well, he was the administrative assistant. Stan was nice. They were all nice people. As I say, I have been very fortunate.

RITCHIE: Senator Symington was very concerned about military issues during his entire career–I remember all those model airplanes he used to have in his office–from the Air Force and the different services. All during the 1960s the Vietnam War was going on. He eventually changed his mind about the war and went from being in favor of it to opposing it. Was that a difficult time? Do you remember much about the stress and strains of the war?

McCREARY: There was a lot of stress, because he was concerned. People were always in and out, in and out, in and out. A lot of those things were ultra-ultra secret. He *felt* things. He was very sensitive. But when you're working that kind of job you've got to know what you're doing, and he did. He knew so many people.

RITCHIE: His son, James, ran for the House. Did you know him?

McCREARY: Yes, I didn't know much about him.

RITCHIE: He used to play the guitar.

McCREARY: Yes, Jimmy, we used to call him Jimmy Symington.

RITCHIE: Jimmy ran for the Senate but didn't make it.

McCREARY: It's unfortunate that he didn't make it. He would have made a good senator.

RITCHIE: Now when you went for Senator Glenn in 1977, you had been working all those years for one senator and now you were working for someone else. Did you find it a different experience?

McCREARY: No, I didn't. In fact, Senator Glenn is so easy-going and so for real that it's just like you could be talking to a friend or a brother. No, I didn't find it

strange at all, until this day I don't. If he sees me in the hall, he'll hug me. He's just that type of person. And Mrs. Glenn, too. And it's always "Mrs. Glenn" or

"Senator." I don't take it upon myself to say "John Glenn." I don't do that. I give them the respect and professional courtesy they deserve. But I was brought up that way.

RITCHIE: Did you do the same type of work for Senator Glenn that you had done for Senator Symington?

McCREARY: Well, I haven't done as much dictation. I just do what I know to do. I have things that I've got to do, and I just do them. He just puts it there and tells me to take care of it, and I do.

RITCHIE: Things like what?

McCREARY: Letters that different ones are writing in for something that I know the answers to. He'll give me an idea of what he wants, and I do that.

RITCHIE: Well, how different is working for the Senate today than when you first got started?

McCREARY: There's just no way in the world you could compare the two. The way it was, it was segregated. The way it is today, you wouldn't even think

there had been segregation. Then your biggest problem was not the senators per se, it was the people who worked for them. But if you hadn't been taught how to deal with people you couldn't do it. I think my father was good for me on that. He didn't like any foolishness. If you are going to do something, do it right. I was taught this as I grew up, so I know this. I know how to respect people and how to speak to people. If a person is older than I, unless they say, "Please don't call me so-and-so, just call me. . ." that's a different thing.

RITCHIE: Well, you're working in a much bigger office now.

McCREARY: Oh, Lord, yes.

RITCHIE: How different is that? Is it hard to keep track of all the people who work in there?

McCREARY: Oh, no, because they all come find me! [laughs] They'll come find me and they want to talk to me. They want to know all about what it was before, just like we're sitting here talking. I tell them a few things.

RITCHIE: Well, have there been any memorable moments in the recent years with Senator Glenn's office.

McCREARY: I don't know, it's always been like a family there. Nothing ultra, nothing out of the way. It's a smooth-running office. And he will, if something comes up that's ultra, he will take care of it. He has functions for the staff and they can come in to a very relaxed atmosphere. He'll talk to staff out in Ohio and everybody's listening in. But everything is togetherness as far as he's concerned in the office. Now if there's an undercurrent, or something's going on, he will sense it and he will straighten it out, or get rid of the person that's doing it. Now, he doesn't play around. He's very strict about things. You do some silly, stupid things, you're gone. I mean, you're not gone two or three weeks later, you're gone that day. He does not play. Once you know that, you don't do that.

RITCHIE: Well, what do you think about Senator Glenn going back into space?

McCREARY: I'm scared for him. I'm nervous for him. I pray for him every night. I say, "Lord, if this is what he wants to do. . ." And he's passed all the exams and he knows what he's in for. But he's older now, that's what concerns me. But I pray for him because if that's what he wants to do, he's going to do it.

RITCHIE: He's retiring from the Senate at the end of this year, will you retire as well?

McCREARY: Yes, I'm ending it. I'm 72, I'll be 73 in February. I really haven't had much time for me.

RITCHIE: I was going to say, you've worked here for 45 years now!

McCREARY: I haven't had much time for me. And my son is my one big moment–and my husband. My younger son died but I have Bunky. And he worries about me. "I'm fine," I say. He drives over here. He's 6 feet 6, huge. He is something else. You should meet him sometime. He's on the Capitol police force in Delaware. He's so tall. My head comes to his waist! People say: "Is that your son?" Yes. But he's quite a guy. But he's doing well, and James did too, my youngest son.

RITCHIE: Well, you've had quite a career here on Capitol Hill.

McCREARY: Yes, I have. I don't talk about it unless a person wants to discuss it. Otherwise I don't say much about it.

RITCHIE: Do you have any photographs from your career, of people that you've dealt with over the years?

McCREARY: I think I have some at home.

RITCHIE: Because it would nice to include some of them with this interview, if you have some photos say of when you were with Senator Symington.

McCREARY: Yes, I've got the whole staff together.

RITCHIE: We can make a copy of it and put it in with the interview.

McCREARY: Sure, okay I'll bring some in.

RITCHIE: Well, this has been a wonderful experience for me. I've enjoyed this enormously. Since we work in the same building, if you think of anything else that you'd like to say for the record, then you can come down here and do another interview. But this has been delightful and I want to thank you very much for coming by today.

McCREARY: Oh, yes, I could talk all day, but I have work to do!

[End of Interview]

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